



THE LIBERTY "BOYS OF '76"

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

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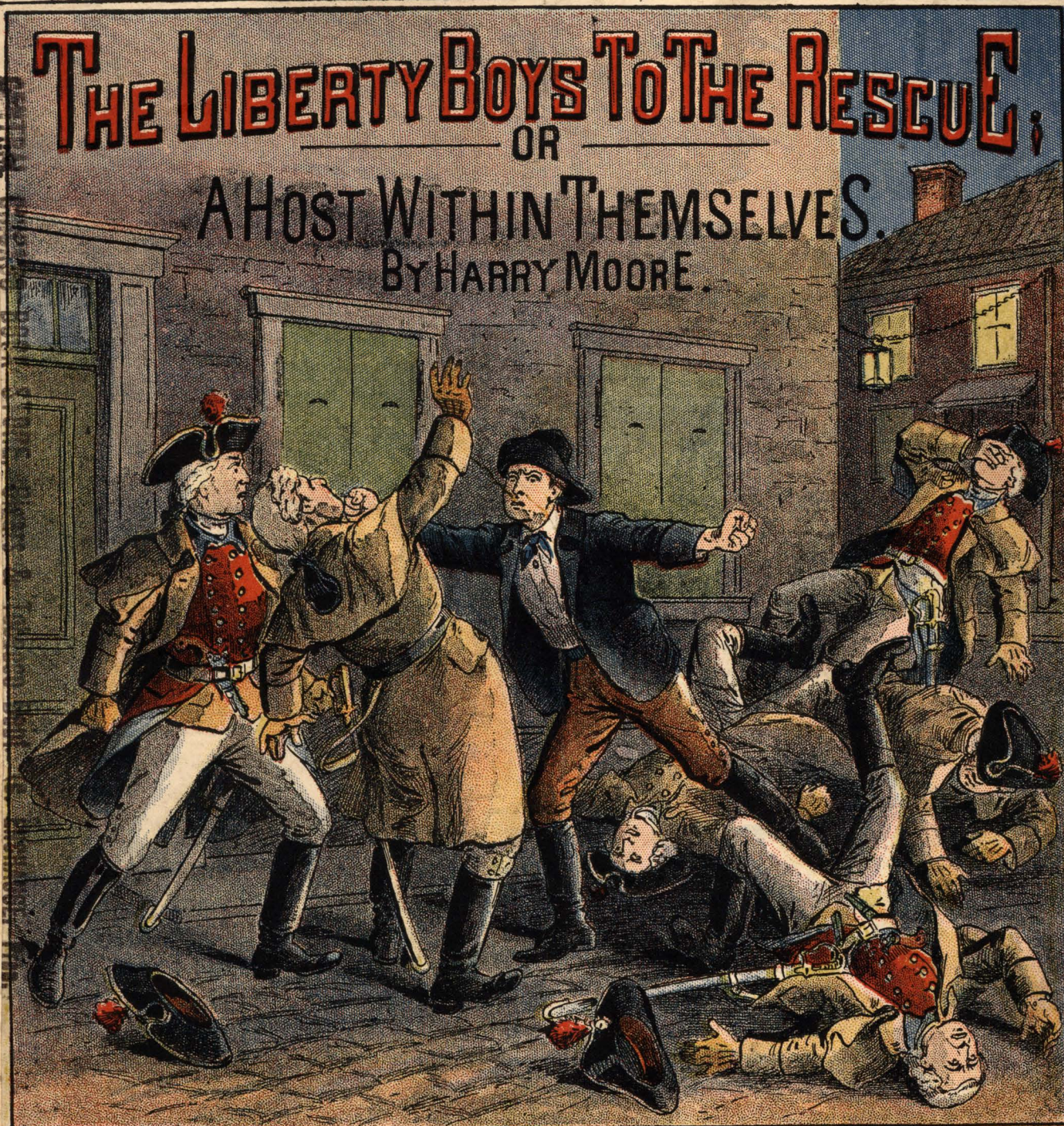
NEW YORK. MARCH 1. 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

THE LIBERTY BOYS TO THE RESCUE; OR

A HOST WITHIN THEMSELVES.

BY HARRY MOORE.



Two more of the redcoats had gone down, as a result of the first impact of Dick's body and fist, and this left three standing. Dick whirled and dealt three blows in quick succession, and the three went down as had their companions.

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CHAPTER I.

THE "LIBERTY BOYS" ON DUTY.

Christmas Day of the year 1776, in New York City.

The British were making merry.

Generals Howe and Cornwallis had left the British army at Trenton, under the command of Rahl and Donop, and come to New York.

They had left orders for their troops to cross the Delaware River as soon as there was ice over it and annihilate the remnant of an army that remained under Washington. Howe and his friends considered the war at an end.

They were sure Washington was at the end of his resources and must surrender as soon as the British troops could get at him.

Since the merriment in New York on this Christmas of the momentous year of 1776.

Cornwallis, the British general, had even gone so far as to pack his portmanteaus and send them aboard the ship; he was intending to sail for England on the morrow. But he did not sail.

Next day word was received by special messenger that General Washington, the man whom they had supposed to be at the end of his resources, had crossed the Delaware River on Christmas night, had fallen upon the Hessians at Red Bank, and after killing their commander, Colonel Rahl, and seventeen of his men, the entire body of Hessians, numbering one thousand men, had been forced to surrender.

General Donop, who had been stationed at Burlington, a few miles below Trenton, had been forced to flee, leaving his wounded, his stores and cannon, and was now on his way to Princeton with his troops.

The news was a shock to Howe and Cornwallis, and, in addition, to all the British and their sympathizers.

Their Christmas festivities were rudely interrupted.

Their joy and hilarity was turned to gloom.

Washington's resources had not been exhausted after all.

The war was not at an end by any means.

Indeed, the end was far from being in sight.

"It will take another campaign to end it!" cried General

Howe, in angry tones; "and then he told Cornwallis he would have to give up the idea of returning to England and start upon the campaign against the "rebels" at once.

Cornwallis mounted a horse and started at once for Princeton, where he found Donop throwing up intrenchments.

From Donop's lips he heard the story of the wonderful feat of the intrepid commander-in-chief of the patriot army.

Cornwallis was furious to think of how they had been outgeneraled by a man with such a small force of men, and he set about getting ready to try to retrieve their shattered fortunes at once.

Meanwhile Washington had recrossed the Delaware River from Trenton, with his one thousand prisoners, and, after getting things in shape, he again crossed the river with his army and took up his position in Trenton.

This was done on the 29th of December.

As soon as he had successfully accomplished this he sent word for Dick Slater, the young man who had done good service both as a spy and in the ranks, to come to headquarters.

Half an hour later Dick, a handsome, bright-faced, manly-looking youth of eighteen years, entered Washington's headquarters and reported to the commander-in-chief.

"Dick," said General Washington, earnestly, "I have some important work for you."

"I shall be glad to attempt to do the work, your excellency," said Dick, quietly; "and if I can accomplish it I shall be only too happy."

"I believe you, my boy. You have served me well many times already, and I think you will be able to do so again."

"I hope so, sir."

"What I wish you to do, Dick, is this: Take a party of men, say a dozen, and go in the direction of Princeton on a scouting expedition. The enemy, as we feel sure, has retired to Princeton, but I am confident that Generals Howe and Cornwallis will join the army there and start forward toward Trenton, to try to retrieve their losses by recapturing and repossessing Trenton. They may do so, but I wish to know of it in ample time, if they do attempt it, and you

will take the men and ride toward Princeton. Go as far as you can, even to within sight of Princeton, if they have not yet left there, and then keep watch. As soon as they start send me word by messenger, and then retreat before them as they advance, sending me word of their movements every few hours, and in this way I will be kept informed of what the enemy is doing. Can you do this, do you think?"

"I think so, your excellency. It should not be difficult of accomplishment."

"No; it will require care and judgment to keep from falling into the hands of the British."

"They will have hard work catching us," smiled Dick. "I shall take some of my 'Liberty Boys,' and as we have some good horses which we captured from the British the other day, we will be able to do the work in good style."

"Take whom you like, Dick. You certainly could not do better than to take some of your 'Liberty Boys.'"

"When shall I start, your excellency?"

"At once, Dick; or as soon as you can get ready."

"We will be off within the hour!" was the prompt reply, and then Dick withdrew.

"Bob will be tickled when he learns that he and some of the other boys are to go along with me," thought Dick, with a smile.

Dick was the captain of a company of youths of about his own age.

He and a close friend of his, Bob Estabrook by name, had got the company up more than four months before the date of which we write, and they had joined Washington's army and had been with it ever since.

They had done good service, too, for no members of the army were braver than they.

They went into battles with the enthusiasm of youth, and their example was inspiring, and wherever the "Liberty Boys of '76" were there would be the scene of some desperate fighting.

Dick was soon at the quarters where the "Liberty Boys" were stationed, and when he told them what the commander-in-chief wished him to do, the entire company wanted to accompany him.

"No, I can't take so many," said Dick. "I will tell you what we will do. You may draw lots to see who are to go. I want a round dozen, no more, no less."

The youths drew lots, and the eleven who were to accompany Dick were highly elated.

The others were downcast, but did not murmur, as they had had their chance and fortune had not favored them.

"Get ready at once, boys," ordered Dick. "We must get off as soon as possible."

The youths obeyed, and fifteen minutes later they announced that they were ready.

Then they left their quarters and went to where horses were kept.

They selected a dozen of the best animals among horses and, saddling and bridling them, they mounted and rode away, going north toward Princeton.

Dick was mounted upon "Major," his own horse, a magnificent animal which he had captured from the British four months before, on Long Island.

Major had been a favorite charger of General Howe.

He was a splendid animal, with Arabian blood in his veins, and he was very speedy and had great staying power.

Major had taken Dick safely through many dangers.

As the youths rode past a house, in leaving Trenton a beautiful girl who stood in a doorway waved to Dick and smiled at him, Dick doffing his hat and bowing with grace and courtesy in response.

"Who is she, Dick?" asked Mark Morrison, a handsome young fellow who rode just behind Dick.

"Her name is Mildred Marshall," replied Dick. "My father is a strong patriot and helped me escape the night he was found out to be a spy when I was in the Hessian camp a short time ago, as you will remember."

"Say, she's a beauty, Dick!" said Mark, and he looked back with an admiring look in his handsome eyes.

"She is pretty," said Dick, quietly; "and as sweet as sugar is beautiful."

"Say, if you talk that way very much more I shall write home and tell sister Alice all about it!" laughed Bob Estabrook, who rode beside Dick.

"And if you do, I shall write to sister Edith and tell her how you are making love to that farmer's daughter over in Pennsylvania!" said Dick, with a smile.

Dick and Bob were each in love with the other's sister.

They lived within a quarter of a mile of each other, in Tarrytown, N. Y., and they had lived thus, close neighbors since they could remember, and they had each fallen in love with the other's sister long ago, and the girls, Alice and Edith, were very much in love with Dick and Bob, and were proud of the splendid records the youths were making in the army.

There was nothing of the flirt in the makeup of either youth, either, and their attentions to other girls whom they encountered in the course of their travels with the army were innocent, and they did not go to the length of making love by any means, so there was no foundation to Dick's remark, as Bob's "making love" had been confined to exchanging a few courteous and friendly words with a beautiful

mer's daughter whom Bob had encountered while out on foraging expedition.

There was no reason why the youths should not remain to Alice and Edith, for two more beautiful girls could have been found.

They were as beautiful as it was possible for girls to be, as sweet as they were beautiful, and the only thing that marred Dick and Bob was the fact that they were so far away from their sweethearts that they could not go and see them when they would have liked to do so.

"Say, I think I shall write to Alice, myself, and tell her about this!" said Mark Morrison, with a grin; "then she will write to Dick and bring him up with a round turn and a step in and get this beautiful Miss Mildred myself!" "Some of the rest of us will have something to say about that, Mark!" said a jolly young fellow named Sam Sunderland. "You'll have to work hard if you win her away from me. I can tell you that right now; for I have fallen in love with her myself!"

"Bah! She wouldn't look at you when I'm around!" said Mark. "You are good-looking, Sam, but you aren't in my class at all!"

"That's all right; but we'll let Miss Mildred settle that question. We won't let you decide it."

They were a jolly lot of youths, and anyone to have seen them that morning would not have thought they were bound on an errand that was dangerous, and might end in the death of one or all of them.

They acted more like they were going on a lark of some kind.

But that was characteristic of the "Liberty Boys."

They were chuck full of life and spirits all the time, but when the necessity arose, when they were confronted by an enemy and there was fighting to be done, they became sober enough, but they fought with a daredevil recklessness that was the highest type of courage, and their example was a source of great encouragement and value to other troops, so the fighting was of the highest order.

The little party rode onward at a brisk canter.

It was quite cold and the horses felt lively and were inclined to move at a good pace.

It was only a matter of ten miles or so to Princeton, and they would reach there soon enough, anyway.

The road led through the timber a good portion of the distance, and Dick, as they drew nearer to Princeton, slackened the speed and told the youths to keep their eyes open. "We must not let ourselves run into ambush," he said.

"We are out to spy on the British, not to let them get the best of us."

"That's right," agreed Bob. "We will have to stop chattering and keep still. If there were any redcoats in half a mile of us, they would hear us."

"Who's making any more noise than Bob Estabrook?" laughed Mark Morrison.

"Mark Morrison, for one," retorted Bob.

When they were within a couple of miles of Princeton they crossed a branch of the Raritan River and entered quite heavy timber.

They proceeded slowly now, and when they had gone a mile farther Dick stopped.

"I don't think it will be good policy to keep ahead on this road," he said. "If there are pickets out they will be stationed along the road. I think we had better strike out into the timber and make a circuit and approach the town from a direction we would not be expected to come from."

"I think that is a good idea," said Bob.

"So do I," declared Sam Sunderland.

The others all said the same.

So they left the road and entered the timber.

Dick led the way and had gone perhaps three-quarters of a mile in a semi-circuitous direction, as he did not wish to approach Princeton too fast, when suddenly he brought Major to a stop.

"There's a house in a clearing just ahead of us," he said in a low voice.

"Good enough!" said Bob; "we can get something to eat. It is noon, and I'm as hungry as a bear."

"Yes, but we had better be careful," said Dick; "there may be redcoats there!"

CHAPTER II.

THE PATRIOT AND HIS WIFE.

"That's right," agreed Mark Morrison; "we had better go a bit slow."

Dick leaped to the ground and passed the halter-strap to Bob.

"Hold my horse, Bob," he said. "I will go and investigate and see if the coast is clear."

Bob took the strap and Dick made his way forward to the edge of the clearing.

He paused there, and standing behind a tree, watched the house for several minutes.

Presently the door of the house, which was a large, double log house, opened and a man emerged.

He was a tall, angular man, and was a typical hunter-farmer of that region.

He had a gun on his shoulder and was evidently starting out hunting.

A tall, gaunt woman appeared in the doorway and said something to the man, and he paused to answer her.

"I guess they are alone," thought Dick; "it will be safe to make my presence known, I guess."

Dick left the shelter of the trees and walked across the clearing toward the house.

The woman, whose face was toward Dick, saw him first, and she said something to the man, evidently her husband, and he turned facing Dick and brought his rifle down off his shoulder and held it in readiness for use.

His action looked a bit threatening, but Dick did not hesitate.

He kept on advancing till he was within ten feet of the man, who made a menacing motion with the rifle, and said:

"Stop whar ye air, stranger! Who are ye, ennyhow, an' whut d'ye want?"

"I am a friend, I think," said Dick, quietly. "I am a traveler, and I have some more friends back here who are hungry. We are looking for some place where we can get something to eat."

"Why don't ye go inter Princeton, then; thar's whur all ther redcoats is, an' they'd give ye somethin' ter eat, I think."

Dick looked at the man and then at the woman, searchingly and shrewdly.

Somehow he got the idea that they were patriots, and that they did not like the redcoats any too well.

He resolved to test the matter a little further before declaring himself, however.

"One would think you did not like the redcoats, the way you talk," he remarked, carelessly.

"I hev good reason not ter like 'em, stranger," was the prompt reply; "they come in heer yisterd'y an' took ever'thin' we hed in the house! The'd a-took ther ole woman, I guess, ef she hedn't a-be'n so homely!" with a grin. "They's the worst theeves I ever see in all my life!"

"I guess you are right about that," said Dick. "You were glad, then, when you heard that Washington had whipped them, and after capturing a thousand of them, had driven the others away from Trenton?"

"I wuz glad uv et until they come heer an' stole me outer house an' home, an' then I a-mos' wished thet Washington hedn't driv' 'em away frum Trenton."

Dick laughed.

"Self-interest is a powerful thing," he said. "Well, w' about it? Can we get something to eat here?"

"How menny uv ye is there?"

"There is just a round dozen of us."

The woman held up her hands in horror.

"Thar hain't enuff stuff in the house to feed three m' let alone a duzzen!" she said.

The man looked keenly at Dick, who returned the look unflinchingly.

"Yer not redcoats?" he asked.

Dick shook his head.

"No," he replied.

"Nur Tories?"

Dick shook his head still more vigorously.

"Not by a long shot!" he said.

The man's face lighted up.

"Then ye mus' be patriots!" he exclaimed.

Dick saw the man was pleased with the thought.

There would be no danger in acknowledging the fact that they were patriots.

"We are patriots," he said, quietly, unbuttoning his coat and showing his uniform.

"Good enuff!" the man said. "Ef ye kin wait an hour, the ole woman will be able ter git ye up somethin' ter eat, for I know whur there is some wild turkeys, an' I kin bag some half an hour."

"We can wait," said Dick. "In fact, we don't care a going any farther until after nightfall, and we would rather stay here than not."

"All right; bring yer frien's ter ther house and make yourselves ter home till I come back."

Dick immediately gave utterance to a peculiar whistle which was a signal for the boys to advance, and a minute later they rode into the clearing and up to the cabin.

"Why, yer all boys!" said the man, who had waited out of curiosity, doubtless, to see Dick's friends.

"Yes; we are known as the 'Liberty Boys of '76,'" replied Dick, quietly.

"Whut!" exclaimed the man; "why, I've heerd tell of a frien' uv mine, name uv Joe Saunders, down Trenton way, hez tole me er lot erbout ther 'Libbity Boys,' an' 'sully erbout one uv the name uv Dick Slater."

"I am Dick Slater," said Dick, quietly.

"Sho! ye don't say!" and the man stared at Dick in silent admiration.

The woman, too, looked at Dick with admiring interest. It was evident that Joe was held in considerable esteem both, and that his praise of Dick had been warm.

"Where will we put the horses?" Dick asked.

"Yer'll hev ter jes' tie 'em ter trees, I guess. I hain't got no stable, save thet leetle shed, yonder, an' it wouldn't hold more'n two uv ther critters."

"What will we do for feed for the horses?" asked Bob.

The man hesitated, and then a grin crossed his homely face, as he said:

"I hain't got no feed, 'cause I hain't got no hoss; but I'll hev er Tory lives over thet away," jerking his thumb to indicate the direction. "He hev er cornfield with some shocks of corn in et, an' ther field hain't more'n er quarter uv er le frum heer. When et gits dark this evenin' yer mought waal, yer knows whut I mean."

"That's the scheme!" cried Bob. "We'll stay here till ter dark and get some corn for the horses."

"What is your name?" asked Dick.

"Hank Sprague."

"Very well, Mr. Sprague. We will remain here, and if it disagreeable to you, we may stay a day or two. I don't mind telling you that we have been sent here by General Washington to watch the British and report their doings by sending messengers to him at Trenton, and we could find no better place close to Princeton from which to pursue our investigations."

"Yer welcome ter stay ez long ez ye like, Dick Slater!" was the hearty reply. "Thar's on'y one thing I ask uv ye."

"And what is that?"

"Thet ye don't call me 'Mister Sprague.' Call me Hank."

"All right, Hank. That is easy."

"Make yerselves ter home," Hank invited; "I'll be back with them turkeys jes' ez soon ez possorble."

"We will do so," was the reply.

"And I hope you won't make any mistake about those turkeys," said Bob, caressing his stomach. "I'm as hungry as a polar bear!"

The man set out then, and was soon lost to sight in the distance.

The youths then attended to the horses.

All they could do was to tie the animals to trees, and this they did.

When they went to the house.

They entered and were made welcome by Mrs. Sprague.

Dick entered into conversation with the woman and learned that she had a son, Tom, who was in the British army.

"I dunno how Tom come ter be a Tory," the woman said, in a sad voice. "He didn't l'arn et frum me nur Hank, but I see et inter him somehow, an' the furst we knowed he was off an' j'ined the British. I don't wisht he'd git killed," she added, soberly; "but I do wish't he'd git wounded so he'd

hev ter come home! Et's hard ter think uv 'im fightin' ag'inst ther peepke uv his own country."

"It is rather hard on you and your husband," said Dick, sympathetically.

"Yes, et's purty hard, but we hev got ter stan' et."

The woman went about her work and the youths sat about the fire in the big fireplace and talked for nearly an hour, and then Mr. Sprague suddenly entered the cabin.

He had four turkeys—fine, big, fat fellows, too.

"Ah, ha! Now we will feast!" said Bob, with an anticipatory grin of pleasure.

"Those are fine fellows!" said Dick.

"They air sartinly all right," grinned Hank.

It took Mr. Sprague and his wife half an hour to dress the turkeys, and then Mrs. Sprague began cooking them.

As fast as the meat was cooked it was set before the youths and they ate heartily, for they were very hungry.

It was a slow process, as they had to wait between times, and it took more than an hour to satisfy the appetites of all.

Then Mr. Sprague and his wife ate in their turn.

The youths spent the rest of the afternoon there, and talked to Mr. Sprague and his wife.

Dick made several trips to the edge of the timber, where he could look toward Princeton, and had seen no signs of the British stirring.

He was afraid they might move, and he wished to know it in time to retreat and send a messenger to General Washington.

As evening drew near Dick became restless.

He managed to keep still, however, till after supper, and then the task of making their way to the cornfield of the Tory and helping themselves to some corn for their horses kept him occupied for another half-hour, but when this had been accomplished, and they were seated in the cabin talking, Dick turned to Bob and said:

"Bob, I believe I will venture into Princeton. I want to see what the redcoats are up to."

Bob started and looked at Dick in wonder, as did the others, also.

"You are crazy, Dick!" Bob said. "There are a lot of them there who would recognize you and you would be made a prisoner and strung up in a hurry!"

"That's right!" agreed Mark Morrison.

"You'd better not risk it, Dick!" said Sam Sunderland.

"It'd be purty dangerous bizness," said Mr. Sprague.

"Oh, not so very dangerous," said Dick. "If it was in the daytime it would be, but after night I will be enabled to keep from being recognized, I am sure."

The others tried to dissuade Dick, but he was determined.

"It is the only way to find out what the redcoats are doing," he said, determinedly. "I am going to go into the town and look around a bit."

The others said no more to try to dissuade him.

They knew Dick well, and knew that when he made up his mind to do a thing he would do it, if possible.

He would attempt it, anyway.

He looked around the room and seemed to be pondering.

Presently he turned to Mr. Sprague.

"Have you anything in the way of old clothing that I could put on, so as to disguise me?" he asked. "I would not be recognized so quickly then."

Mr. Sprague looked inquiringly at his wife.

"Didn't Tom leave some uv his ole clothes here, wife?" he asked.

The woman nodded.

"Yes; there is some uv his clothes out in his room," was the reply.

"An' they'd jes' erbout fit ye, too, Dick," declared Hank. "Tom is our boy," he explained. "He's twenty yeers ole, an' he lef' us ter go inter the British army."

The man's voice was sad.

"We done all we could ter keep 'im frum doin' uv et," said the woman; "but he wuz boun' ter go, an' we couldn't he'p ourselves. I wuz tellin' the young gentlemen erbout Tom while ye wuz out huntin'," she added, explanatively, to her husband.

"That will be just the thing!" said Dick. "I will wear his clothes, and if I get in a tight place I will claim I am a farmer's boy, come to town for a doctor, or something like that."

"Thet will be er good plan," said Hank. "Ye kin tell 'em ye air huntin' Dockter Scott, ef they gits ye pinned down. He's ther leadin' dockter uv Princeton."

"All right; I'll remember the name."

Hank now, at Dick's request, showed him into the room that had been occupied by Tom, the Tory son, and the youth took a look at the clothing.

It was in the main odds and ends, and cast-off garments of rough cloth and make, but it would answer Dick's purpose admirably.

"It is just what I need," the youth said.

"All right; I'm glad uv et—an' wife an' me will both be glad ef Tom's clothes will help in the Great Cause."

Then Hank left the room, leaving a candle behind him.

Dick quickly removed his uniform and donned a suit of the rough clothes left by Tom. An old, dilapidated hat and a rough pair of boots completed the makeup, and when Dick

went back into the other room the youths uttered exclamations.

"Say, your best friends wouldn't know you on the street after night, Dick!" said Bob.

"They would not; that's a fact!" said Sam Sunderland.

"Never!" declared Mark Morrison.

All said the same thing.

"I'm glad to hear you say it," said Dick. "I shall feel quite safe."

"Don't be too risky on the strength of it, though, Dick," said Bob, who did not wish Dick to get into trouble.

"Oh, I'll be careful, Bob."

After a little further conversation, Dick said he would bid them all good-bye and he left the house.

He had gone only a few steps when the door opened and Mrs. Sprague emerged from the house and called to him.

Dick paused, and when the woman approached him he said, in a voice which trembled with emotion:

"Mister Slater, I wanter ask ye sumthin'. Et is th'et ef ever ye git a chance ter do my boy Tom a favor, ye do it? I mean, if ye should run acrost 'im an' he tryin' ter captur' ye, er sumthin' like thet, ye would sp' his life, instead uv killin' 'im?"

"I promise you, Mrs. Sprague," said Dick, earnestly.

He was touched by the woman's words, and he thought how his mother would feel if she was situated as this poor woman was.

"Oh, thank ye, Mister Slater!" the woman exclaimed. "an' ye will tell the other young men the same thing, please a poor old mother?"

"I will, madame. I don't suppose I will ever meet him, son, or that I would know him if I did, but I promise th'et if I do ever meet him and know him, and can spare a life, or do anything to save it if it is threatened, I will glot do it."

"Oh, thank ye! Thank ye!" the woman said.

Then Dick bade her good-night and as she re-entered the cabin he struck off through the timber in the direction of Princeton.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

Dick was soon out of the timber.

He emerged into a field.

The town lay less than half a mile distant.

The quickest and easiest way to reach it was to cross the field.

This Dick set out to do.
 He walked along at a fair pace.
 A few minutes later he left the field and approached the town.
 He moved slowly and cautiously now.
 He knew he was likely to stumble onto a picket at any moment.
 He wished to avoid them if possible.
 It was his desire to slip into the town.
 If he were challenged and could not explain his errand to the satisfaction of the sentinel he would be turned over to the officer of the guard, who would in all probability take him before some of the officers who would recognize him.
 It was a clear, cold night.
 The moon was not yet up, but the stars were numerous and brilliant, and gave a faint light, which made it possible to a keen-eyed individual like Dick to see a short distance with more or less distinctness.
 Dick would advance a few feet, stop, look and listen, and then, if he saw or heard nothing, he would move forward again.
 He was just about to enter the town when he heard the faint sound of measured footsteps, and stooping down so as to get the clear sky for a background, he was enabled to see faint outlines of a sentinel.
 The sentinel was guarding the street at the entrance to the town.
 Dick stood perfectly still and pondered the situation.
 "I had better retreat and try another street," he thought. "Perhaps they may not have all the streets guarded."
 The street where Dick was extended east and west through the town, and Dick was on the west side of the town.
 They would likely guard the south and west sides the best," thought Dick, "as it would likely be from one or another of these directions that they would look for the approach of the patriot forces. If I go around to the north I think I shall be able to enter unchallenged."
 This was good reasoning, and the event proved that it was.
 Dick made his way back to what he considered a safe distance, and then he made a circuit and approached the town from the north.
 He was very careful, for he thought it was barely possible he might be mistaken about there being no sentinels on this side.
 His surmise had been correct, however.
 There was no sentinel posted there, and he entered the town unchallenged.
 He walked slowly down the street and kept his eyes wide

Presently he met a couple of redcoats, who looked at him a bit suspiciously, Dick thought.

"Hullo!" one said, as they came to a stop, barring his advance. "Who are you, and where are you going?"

"I live on a farm out in the country aways," replied Dick, in a strong nasal voice, "an' I hev come to town to buy some things."

"Oh, ho! That's it, is it?"

"Yes, Mister Officer."

This little bit of flattery tickled the vanity of the redcoat, and he slapped his companion on the shoulder.

"Ho, comrade, did you hear that?" he exclaimed. "I'm an officer, do you hear? Salute your officer, I say!"

Then both laughed.

"Make him salute," said the other, thinking to have a bit of fun with the supposed countryman.

"That's a good idea!" and the other laughed. "Salute, country! What right have you to stand there in front of an officer in the king's service and not offer to salute? Salute at once!"

"I don't know how. I don't know what ye mean, Mister Officer," said Dick, with a capital assumption of ignorance.

The two soldiers laughed.

"There's provincial ignorance for you!" said one.

"Right!" from the other.

The fellows had been drinking, and one especially was ripe for devilry of almost any sort.

"Make him salute, anyway!" he suggested.

"That's a good idea!" the other agreed, falling into the idea of the other to have some fun out of the countryman.

"Salute, anyway, whether you know how or not!"

"But how can I if I don't know how?" asked Dick, pretending to be worried.

"That's for you to say," was the reply. "You've got to salute, and that's all there is about it!"

"Yes; if you don't know how, guess at it," from the other.

"You have got to salute us, and you had better do so at once."

"Oh, I have got to salute ye, hev I?" remarked Dick, in a peculiar tone, which the two ascribed to fear.

The tone was not occasioned by fear, however.

Dick saw the fellows were bent on having fun with him, and decided to turn the joke on them.

They were going to force him to salute them; well and good. He would do it, but he would give them a salute that they would not forget soon, and such as they were not looking for.

"Yes, you have got to salute us!" was the reply.

"But I told you thet I don't know how," protested Dick.

"It doesn't matter; we aren't particular, just so you salute us. If you don't know the regulation salute, invent one of your own. That will do as well."

"All right," said Dick; "I'll do so! Shall I do it right now?"

"Yes, right now," and they drew themselves up in military style to receive the salute.

"All right, then, Mister Officers; I salute ye—thus!"

As Dick spoke he leaped forward.

He had measured the distance carefully in the dim light and out shot his fists and took the two would-be funny redcoats fair between the eyes, knocking both down upon the sidewalk with a thump.

"There! That is my style of salute to such fellows as you!" cried Dick, and he leaped away up the street at a run and was around the corner before the amazed and dazed redcoats could scramble to their feet and collect their wits.

But weren't they mad when they got up?

They raved and swore like pirates.

To be treated thus by a country lout—as they imagined Dick to be—was almost more than their proud spirits could endure.

"Curses on the country lout!" roared one, feeling around for his hat, which had been knocked off when its owner struck the pavement.

"I'll murder him!" roared the other, also feeling around for his hat.

In their half-dazed condition and the semi-darkness they could not see very well, and accidentally bumped their heads together.

This made them angry at each other.

"You fool!" roared one, rubbing his head.

"You idiot!" roared the other, also rubbing his head.

"You got us into this difficulty by wanting to have some fun with the lout!" cried one.

"You were in for it as much as I was!" declared the other.

"I wasn't!"

"You were!"

"You're a liar!"

"You're another!"

"Jove! but I'll take the lie from no one! Take that!"

"That" was a blow in the face.

A fierce cry of pain and anger was the response from the man struck, and he returned the blow with interest.

Then they went to fighting like two Kilkenny cats, and they fought until both were pounded in such a manner as to make them almost unrecognizable.

They would have fought till one or both was unconscious,

doubtless, but some comrades in arms came along and parted them and wanted to know what it was all about.

The two men tried to explain, but were incoherent for a time.

Their friends managed to get the story out of them finally, however, and when they heard it they could not keep from laughing.

"It seems that the country lout got the better of you, after all," one remarked.

"Jove! He must have been a pretty good man, after all to have laid you both out so easily and neatly!" from another.

"He hit harder than a mule can kick!" grumbled one of the two victims of their own attempt at being smart.

"I thought a house had fallen on me!" complained the other.

And then their friends had to laugh again.

The tones of the voices of the two were so lugubrious sounding that they could not help it.

"And not satisfied with the clips the countryman gave you, you must fall upon and pound up each other, eh?" remarked one.

"Well, we were half-dazed and angry, and didn't more than half know what we were doing," explained one of the battered men.

"I see. Well, come along to your quarters and get patched up, fellows."

The two allowed themselves to be led away.

Meanwhile Dick had been making his way through town.

He had expected to be followed by the two redcoats, was surprised when he saw no signs of pursuit by them.

"That is strange," he thought. "I expected that they would be after me lively, thirsting for revenge and eager to get even with me."

He did not know, of course, that the two had gotten into a fight between themselves, and had he known it he would have been amused.

"Well, it suits me just that much better," he thought. "I would be likely to attract attention if I was forced to keep on running, and now I can slow down and take it easy." Dick did so.

He did not wish to attract attention if he could help it. He kept a lookout behind him, however.

He still feared the two redcoats would pursue him.

He could not understand why they had not done so.

But of course they did not do so, and he soon got over his thought that they would appear.

He watched in front of him.

He kept his eyes open, too, with regard to the houses and stores he passed.

He wished to, if possible, locate the headquarters of the British generals, Howe and Cornwallis.

This would be a difficult matter, however.

Still, he might stumble onto them.

Dick hoped he might do so.

He was pretty lucky, usually.

If possible, Dick wished to learn something regarding the plans of the British.

He did not more than half expect to be able to do so, but he was willing to take considerable risk in order to do so.

Dick was a brave youth.

He had won many times before by employing bold tactics, and he thought that he might do so again.

He was ready to take the risk, anyway, in the hope of gaining valuable information.

He was moving along the street when suddenly a man came running down the steps of a house and addressed him:

"We want a doctor, quick, my boy!" he said. "General Howe is suddenly ill! I am a stranger here and do not know any doctors. Bring one quickly and I will pay you well for it!"

"All right, sir; I'll bring a doctor at once!" said Dick.

Then he turned and ran down the street.

"Perhaps I may be able to get into the house now," he thought. "I'll get the doctor and try to get in along with him!"

It was a bold scheme, but Dick was the youth to put it through boldly.

CHAPTER IV.

AS A DOCTOR'S ASSISTANT.

But Dick was confronted by a difficulty.

He did not know where to go to find a doctor.

Suddenly he remembered that Mr. Sprague had said Dr. Scott was the name of the leading doctor in Princeton.

He ran into a store and asked the proprietor where Dr. Scott's office was.

The grocer asked Dick what he wished with the doctor.

"I don't want him for myself," the youth replied; "General Howe has been taken suddenly ill and a man told me to get the doctor."

"What! General Howe ill? Then you must hurry, my boy! The general must not be allowed to suffer for want

of a doctor's services. Come out here on the street; I will show you where Dr. Scott's office is."

Dick accompanied the Tory tradesman out onto the street.

The man pointed down the street.

"A stairway leads up between two buildings yonder," he said. "Go up those stairs and knock on the door at the landing. That is Dr. Scott's office."

"Thank you!" said Dick, and he hastened away.

He was soon up the flight of stairs and knocked on the door.

"Come in," called a voice.

Dick entered.

He found himself in a typical doctor's office.

A portly man sat at a desk at one side.

He was looking over his shoulder at Dick.

"Well?" he growled.

"You are wanted, Dr. Scott, at the headquarters of the British general; he is very ill."

"Who—Cornwallis?" was the query.

"No; General Howe."

The doctor did not seem much excited.

"Hum!" he said; "what ails him—an overdose of the patriot army or too much Christmas turkey?"

Dick could hardly keep from smiling.

"I'll wager the doctor is a patriot!" he thought.

"I don't know, sir," he replied. "One of the officers came out as I was passing there just now and told me to bring a doctor quick, as General Howe was taken suddenly ill. That is all I know about it."

"Humph! Well, I guess I'll have to go and see what ails him; though I think it would be a good thing for the country if three or four of the British generals would die off suddenly!"

Dick laughed.

"I don't know but you're right," he said. "I judge from what you have said that you are a patriot."

The doctor looked at Dick shrewdly.

"I'm no king's man," he said, calmly, "and you are no farmer's boy!" he added, eyeing Dick's bright and handsome face keenly.

"You are right, Dr. Scott," said Dick.

And then Dick suddenly decided to trust in the doctor and get him to let him enter the headquarters of the British generals with him.

"I am a patriot," he continued; "and I am here to try to secure information of the plans of the British. You are going to their headquarters; let me go with you. I'll carry your doctor's case."

"What is your name?" the doctor asked, with an air of interest.

"Dick Slater, sir."

The doctor started.

"I have heard of you," he said; "you have made quite a name for yourself as a spy."

"I have done a little something in that line," said Dick, modestly.

"I should say you have!" earnestly. "Well, I'll take you along if you wish it, but you will be venturing into a dangerous place. If you should be detected you would probably be shot or hanged."

"I know that, doctor."

Dick spoke coolly and calmly.

"And you are willing to risk it?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"All right; come along with me, then."

"As soon as I get a chance, after we are inside the house, I will leave you, doctor, and shift for myself," said Dick.

"You had better stay beside me, my boy. If you go to roaming about by yourself you will be captured."

"I'll risk it," with a smile.

The doctor rose and put on his hat.

Then he handed Dick his medicine-case and the two left the office and went down the street.

They made their way toward the British headquarters at a rapid walk.

The grocer was standing in the doorway as they came along, cold as the night was.

"Found the doctor, eh?" he remarked to Dick.

"Yes," the youth replied.

"I hope you'll do your very best by the general, Dr. Scott," the man said, and Dick's companion growled under his breath.

"The old Tóry!" he muttered, when out of hearing. "I don't like him, nor any of his kind!"

"You are right," agreed Dick; "there is some excuse for the British doing as they are trying to do, but I can find no excuse for Americans who would help them."

"There is no excuse for them."

They were at British headquarters now, and they ascended the steps and the doctor knocked on the door.

It was opened at once by an orderly.

"I am the doctor," said Dr. Scott, and he strode through into the hallway, followed by Dick.

"Who is this?" the orderly asked.

"My man of work; here, give me the case. You stay here till I come out again."

"Very well, sir," said Dick.

"You can sit down in that room there," said the orderly indicating a room on the right, and Dick entered the room as the orderly and the doctor passed on toward the room occupied by General Howe.

There was a candle burning in the room which Dick found himself in.

He glanced around and saw there was a door at the farther end of the room.

He walked to the door immediately.

He heard voices, which came from the other side of the door, evidently from the adjoining room.

Dick listened and was able to make out the words being spoken.

He soon learned that the room was occupied by several British officers.

They were talking of the campaign which was to be begun against Washington and the patriot army at once.

Dick learned that it was intended that the British forces should move upon Trenton the first or the second day of January.

"I wonder if the illness of General Howe will delay us any?" Dick heard one ask.

"Oh, no," was the reply. "Besides the general is only temporarily ill. He will be all right by to-morrow."

At this instant Dick heard the footsteps of the orderly returning from the direction of General Howe's room, and he quickly sat down and assumed a look of dull disinterestedness.

"Is your employer a good doctor?" the orderly asked, looking carelessly at Dick.

"Huh?" remarked Dick.

The orderly repeated the question.

"Guess he is," said Dick. "I dunno, 'cause I never hed 'im doctor me none."

"He cures other people, though, doesn't he?"

Dick nodded.

"Guess he does," he replied.

The orderly asked no more questions, and Dick heard him mutter something like "Ignorant clod!"

Dick smiled in his sleeve.

"He won't bother me with any more questions," he thought.

A few minutes later there came a knock at the door and the orderly went out into the hall and opened the door.

He closed the door and then conducted someone along the hall.

Dick seized upon the opportunity, and, leaping to his feet, listened at the connecting door again.

The men were still talking and Dick heard them discuss-

ing the ways and means of moving upon Trenton and making the attack on the patriot army.

This was just what he wished to learn, and he was glad that he had been so fortunate as to happen along at just the time he did, so as to be sent for the doctor and thus get a chance to come into the headquarters of the British generals with the man of medicine.

"I have learned considerable," he thought; "and I will send one of the boys back to Trenton early in the morning with a letter to the commander-in-chief, telling him all I have learned, and then we will keep close watch, and as soon as the redcoats start to move upon Trenton I will send another messenger."

Dick was well pleased.

Just then he heard the approaching footsteps of the orderly and quickly returned to his seat.

He was only just in time.

The next moment the orderly entered.

He glanced at Dick, but said nothing.

He judged it was useless to waste time upon such a dull individual.

This suited Dick very well.

He had no desire to carry on a conversation with the fellow.

Presently there came the sound of footsteps along the hall, and then Dr. Scott appeared in the doorway leading from the hall.

At the same instant the door connecting with the adjoining room—the door at which Dick had been listening—opened, and three men in the uniforms of British officers entered the room.

They had their hats on and their cloaks, and were evidently going out.

Dick was afraid to look around.

One of the officers might be someone whom he had encountered in the past, and who might recognize him.

He leaped to his feet and hastened across the room toward the doctor.

"Hold on, there!" cried an imperious voice, which sounded familiar to Dick.

Dick knew the man was speaking to him, but he did not stop.

Instead, he went faster.

"Are ye ready to go, doctor?" he asked, in a loud, disguised voice.

"Yes, I am ready to——"

"Stop, I say!" roared a voice from behind Dick, and the youth heard hurried footsteps approaching him from that direction.

Dick felt sure that the man was going to seize him.

He would not be captured now for anything in the world.

He had secured some valuable information.

It must be sent to General Washington.

If he was to be made a prisoner the information would not reach the commander-in-chief of the Continental army.

So Dick acted instantly.

He leaped toward the doorway leading into the hall.

"Look out, doctor!" he cried.

The doctor understood him and sprang forward and to one side, so as to let Dick pass.

Then he, with seeming carelessness, got into the way of the British officer, who was approaching with outstretched hands, in an endeavor to seize Dick.

He got hold of the doctor instead.

"What does this mean? What are you trying to do?" cried Doctor Scott.

Then he seized the officer and held him, pretending to think the officer was attacking him.

He held the man till he heard the outer door open and shut, and then he let go of the angry Briton.

"What do you mean?" almost hissed the officer, who was Captain Parks, an officer who had seen Dick several times. "Why did you interfere? You have aided a rebel spy to escape!"

Then Captain Parks rushed out into the hall and to the front door.

He jerked the door open and rushed outside.

He looked up, then down the street.

Half a block away he saw Dick running with all his might.

The officer drew a pistol, leveled it and fired.

Dick kept on running.

"Missed!" growled the captain. Then he drew his other pistol and fired.

Still Dick continued on his way, without slackening his speed.

"Curse the luck! I can't shoot worth a cent in the darkness!" the captain growled.

He had shot better than he thought, however, for one of the bullets from the pistol had grazed Dick's side, drawing blood.

"That was a close call," the youth murmured.

He kept on running as swiftly as ever, and the first cross-street he came to he turned down it.

He knew there would be a crowd out looking for him in a very few minutes.

The shots fired by the officer would arouse everybody.

Dick was aware that to be seen running would bring sus-

picion upon himself and cause him to be chased, but he did not dare drop into a walk, so he kept on running.

"Ah! If I only had a horse now I would be all right!" he thought.

But he had no horse.

He would have to trust to his own efforts to escape.

He ran rapidly onward and turned the next corner.

As he did so he ran almost, literally speaking, into the arms of half a dozen redcoats.

"Seize him!" cried one. "Seize the fellow and hold him! He has been up to some deviltry or he wouldn't be running. He's a rebel, and I'll bet on it!"

CHAPTER V.

A CHASE AND AN ESCAPE.

But Dick did not intend to allow himself to be "seized."

Not if he could help it.

He was so close to the men when he came around the corner that he could not have avoided them had he tried.

So he didn't try.

Instead he put on more steam and plunged into the crowd with all the force of a battering-ram.

He did more.

He struck out with his fists, straight into the faces of a couple of the redcoats, who were directly in front of him.

One of them was the man who had ordered the others to "seize" Dick.

He found this was a more difficult job than he had anticipated.

In fact, about the first thing he realized after giving utterance to the words was that the back of his head had come in contact with something very hard and unyielding.

It was the pavement.

Then he saw about a million stars and meteors, with a few comets thrown in for good measure, and then he didn't see anything for awhile.

He had been knocked senseless by the blow in the face from Dick's fist and the thump of his head on the pavement.

Two more of the redcoats had gone down as a result of the first impact of Dick's body and fist, and this left three standing.

Dick whirled and dealt three blows in quick succession, and the three went down, as had their companions.

Then Dick leaped away up the street as fast as he could run.

Five of the men struggled to their feet as quickly as possible.

They were somewhat dazed, and it took them a few seconds to remember what had happened and realize where they were.

Then they saw the fugitive running up the street, and struck out in pursuit.

They had a double incentive to try to catch the fugitive now.

They suspected him of being a rebel, and then they wished to get revenge for the manner in which he had floored them.

They gave chase as lively as they could.

They yelled for the fugitive to stop.

But Dick didn't stop.

They had better have saved their wind to be used in running.

Dick ran as swiftly as he could.

He had kept his bearings and knew that he was going in a northern direction.

He was glad of it.

This would take him out of the town on the north side, and this would mislead his enemies.

They would think he had come from that direction.

Then he could circle around and make his way to the cabin of Mr. Sprague at his leisure.

Dick did not want the redcoats to find out that he and his companions had headquarters at the cabin.

It was a convenient place to stay, and he did not want to be forced to leave there.

Then, too, he would have been sorry to get Mr. and Mrs. Sprague in trouble, which would be the case if the redcoats learned that they had given shelter to the "rebels."

Dick drew gradually away from his pursuers.

They realized this, and fearing he would make his escape, they began firing upon him.

It was dark, however, and they were forced to fire by guess.

The bullets flew wide of the mark.

Still one might accidentally go straight to the mark, and Dick did not like the idea of being made a target of.

He turned the first corner he came to, and ran rapidly across to the next street, where he turned again.

Dick had put on an extra burst of speed, and by exerting himself to the utmost he managed to turn the corner before the redcoats turned the first corner.

As Dick rushed around the corner a man was coming along the street on horseback.

The horse was evidently a somewhat scary animal, for it became frightened at Dick and stopped and whirled half

around so suddenly as to cause the rider to pitch off onto the ground on his head.

The man lay still.

He had been either killed by the fall or knocked senseless.

Dick did not stop to investigate which.

What interested him was the horse.

The animal, after its first action of shying, had stopped.

It stood now looking at Dick, who had stopped running, and giving vent to little snorts of half-fear, half-surprise and inquiry.

Evidently the animal realized that it had been frightened by a man, something it was familiar with, and should not have become frightened by, but it could not understand why he had come running around the corner so suddenly.

Dick stepped down off the curb and approached the horse.

"Good boy! Nice boy!" he said, coaxingly.

The horse arched his neck, snorted and looked at Dick inquiringly and somewhat suspiciously. He doubtless feared a trick.

Dick kept talking to him in kindly tones, however, and the horse did not offer to run away.

Closer and closer Dick drew to the animal, and while he was yet ten feet away he heard the patter of the feet of his pursuers.

The horse heard it, too, and arched his neck and snorted.

"Good boy! Nice boy!" said Dick, and he moved forward more rapidly.

The horse's attention was attracted by the sound of the footsteps and its attention was momentarily taken away from Dick.

The youth improved his opportunity.

He leaped forward.

His leap was like that of a panther.

His hands reached out and grasped the bridle-reins.

The horse awoke to its danger too late.

It gave a snort of fear and leaped back.

Dick had hold of the reins, however, and held on.

More, he sprang around to the side of the animal andaped into the saddle at a bound.

He placed his feet in the stirrups, and at this instant the decoats came racing around the corner.

The horse saw them, and giving vent to a snort of fright whirled upon its hind legs, as upon a pivot, and darted away up the street.

Dick was not unseated by the horse's sudden action.

He had been on the lookout for something of the kind, and kept his seat.

The redcoats took in the situation at a glance.

The moon was now up and shining, and they could see fairly well.

They gave utterance to a wild yell of rage.

They realized that their prey was about to escape them.

They had already fired off their pistols, so could not fire upon the fugitive.

All they could do was yell.

So they yelled like good fellows.

This was without effect, unless it may have served to accelerate the speed of the flying horse, and Dick was soon out of the town and speeding along the highway.

"I'll keep straight on for a mile or so," thought Dick; "so as to mislead anyone who may see me, and then I will turn toward the west, go in that direction a mile or two, and then back south, after which I will make my way eastward till I am in the vicinity of Mr. Sprague's house."

This plan Dick put into effect.

He rode onward toward the north till he came to a road crossing the one he was on. He was two miles from Princeton, and felt safe in turning aside, and he did so.

He rode along the road toward the west a distance of two miles and then turned toward the south.

He kept on in this direction nearly two miles, when he entered the timber.

He was almost due west from Princeton now, and about two miles distant from the town.

He had allowed the horse to slacken his speed to a walk, as the animal had been ridden fast a distance of several miles, and suddenly Dick was amazed and somewhat startled to see a dozen horsemen come galloping out of a road which led from Princeton.

He knew that there was a road there, leading due west from Princeton, but he had not expected to encounter any redcoats at that juncture of the two roads.

He had expected to fool them completely by riding out of the town in a northerly direction.

But here were some redcoats, and that they had come here for the purpose of heading him off was proven when they gave utterance to shouts of delight as their eyes fell upon him.

Dick knew he would not dare show fight.

There were too many of the redcoats.

A dozen to one was too great odds.

He would have to try to make his escape.

He did not feel like turning around and making a race for it, back in the direction from which he had come.

His horse was too tired.

He would probably be overtaken.

No; he would take to the woods.

As his horse was tired, and it would be awkward trying to ride through the timber, anyway, he decided to abandon the animal.

To decide was to act.

As the triumphant shouts of the redcoats came to his ears he brought his horse to a stop and leaped to the ground.

He leaped away, and darted into the timber at the side of the road.

As the redcoats saw this action on Dick's part, they gave vent to loud and angry yells.

They knew they were dealing with a shrewd and slippery customer.

Captain Parks had told who Dick was, and they knew he was the boy spy who had already done so many daring things as to get his name up as the most successful and daring patriot spy of the Revolution.

They knew that he would be hard to capture, now that he had abandoned the horse and taken to the timber.

They would have to do likewise.

They could not hope to follow him in the woods on horseback.

He would be in a condition to laugh at their efforts to track him.

No; they would have to do as he had done.

They acted promptly.

They leaped down off their horses, tied them and entered the timber.

They scattered.

They felt that their chances would be better than if they kept together.

In this, of course, they were right.

But their chances of catching Dick were slim indeed.

He was a youth who had been raised in the woods, as it were.

He was skilled in woodcraft.

They were not.

Hence he would have the advantage.

It was quite dark in the timber.

The moon did not penetrate here.

This was to Dick's advantage.

He realized this.

He felt secure as soon as he had got into the woods.

Still he would have to exercise some care.

Then a sudden thought came to him.

Why not play a trick on the redcoats?

While they were searching for him, why could he not slip through their line, return to the road, mount one of their horses and ride away in triumph?

There was no reason why he should not do it, Dick thought.

He made up his mind to attempt it, anyway.

He entered the timber only a short distance.

When he was a hundred yards in he paused, and taking his station behind a tree, waited, silently and watchfully, for the coming of the redcoats.

He knew they would be along very soon.

And so it proved.

Scarce more than a minute had elapsed before he heard the footsteps of the redcoats.

He listened intently, and was able to determine from the sounds that he would be about half way between two of the redcoats.

"They have scattered out," he thought, "and are about thirty feet apart. That is all right for me. As soon as they have passed me I will strike back to the road, mount one of the horses and get away from here in a hurry."

Dick stood close to the tree and waited.

Presently the British soldiers were even with him.

Then they passed him.

The youth stood like a statue.

"How foolish of them to think they could find me in the woods in the dark," he thought. "They could pass within three feet of me and still not find me."

The plan of procedure of the redcoats suited Dick very well, however.

He was not disposed to complain.

If he had had the arranging of affairs he could not have arranged them more to his satisfaction.

When the redcoats had passed on twenty or thirty yards Dick left his position by the tree.

He stole away through the timber.

He moved as noiselessly as an Indian scout.

He made no noise at all.

If a redcoat had been within three yards of Dick he could not have heard the youth as he moved along.

As there were none of the Britons anywhere near as close as that, there was no danger that the youth would be heard.

He moved onward through the timber.

A few minutes later he reached the road.

He thought it possible that the redcoats might have left a man to guard the horses, so he proceeded cautiously.

It would have been the wise thing to do, of course, for the redcoats to leave one or two of their number on guard over the horses, but they had not done anything of the kind.

The idea of the fugitive returning, doubling on them like a fox, and taking a horse and continuing on his way had not occurred to them.

So it was all plain sailing for Dick.

He could select a horse at his leisure, mount and ride away without let or hindrance.

But another thought struck the youth.

Why not capture the horses and take them away, leaving the redcoats to foot it back to Princeton?

That would be a good joke on them.

Not only that, but the horses would come in very handy for General Washington's officers, and for the use of messengers, etc.

Dick resolved to try to get away with the entire lot of horses, anyway.

He selected one which he would ride, then he untied the others, one after another, and tied the halter straps of one to the pommel of the saddle on the back of another. One after another he served in this manner, and when he had fixed them all, including the horse he had escaped out of Princeton on, he mounted the horse he had selected and rode slowly away.

The other horses followed, being pulled along by the halter straps, and it made quite a string.

Dick was well pleased with the success of his plan so far.

"I hope I will be able to get clear away out of sight and sound before they come back to the road," he thought.

Then he chuckled to himself.

"I would like to see them when they return and find all their horses gone," he said. "Won't they be mad, though?"

Dick's hope was realized.

He rode away, and disappeared into the night, and no sound came from the rear.

The redcoats were still in the timber searching for him.

"Maybe they will learn something about woodcraft before they get out," mused Dick, smiling, "or, more likely," he added, the smile deepening, "they will get lost, and wander around in the timber all night. I hope they may."

The youth rode onward.

He had to let the horses go in a walk, as had he tried to go faster some of them would have held back, broken the halter straps and escaped.

Half an hour later he entered the timber at a point not more than a quarter of a mile from the cabin of Mr. Sprague, and after considerable trouble, as the horses got tangled up among the trees two or three times, he reached the clearing.

He rode right up to the door and dismounted.

He knocked upon the door.

Instantly there was the sound of footsteps.

Then the door opened and Bob appeared, outlined against the big wood fire in the fireplace.

He looked at Dick.

Then he looked at the horses.

"Great guns, Dick! What have you there?" he exclaimed.

"Horses!" replied Dick.

CHAPTER VI.

TOM SPRAGUE.

The other youths came out of the cabin in a hurry.

Mr. Sprague and his wife followed suit.

They had all remained up, awaiting Dick's return.

"Thirteen horses!" said Bob, who had counted them.

"Where are the men who were riding them, Dick?"

"In the woods, Bob."

"In the woods?"

"Yes."

Bob and the other youths stared at Dick, and then looked around toward the surrounding timber, as if expecting to see a lot of redcoats appear.

"What woods, Dick? These here?" and he gave a comprehensive sweep of the hands.

"No," and then Dick told his story in as few words as possible, all listening with interest.

"And now," said Dick in conclusion, "I want some of you boys to take these horses to the commander-in-chief at Trenton, and I want to send him a message, also."

"All right; some of us are ready to start at any moment, Dick," said Bob.

"I guess six of you will be enough to go," said Dick. "You can each ride your own horse and lead two others, one on each side."

"Name who you wish to go, Dick," said Bob.

Dick did so, and the six named, of whom Bob was one, got ready at once.

Dick entered the cabin and wrote a letter to General Washington, telling the commander-in-chief what he had discovered, and this he gave to Bob to deliver.

The youths were soon ready for the start, and bidding Dick and those who were to remain behind good-by, they rode away.

Then the youths and Mr. and Mrs. Sprague entered the cabin.

They talked for a while, and then Mr. Sprague and his wife withdrew to the room that had been their son's before he went away to the war, and the youths had the big room to themselves.

They threw some comfortables down on the floor and lay down in their clothes, and were soon asleep.

At about noon next day Bob and his five companions came back.

"What did the commander-in-chief say, Bob?" asked Dick, eagerly.

"He said that was just the information he wanted, Dick," replied Bob. "He said for you to watch the British closely, and send a messenger to him each day, keeping him informed of everything. And he wishes to know of the movements of the British forces as soon as possible after they start."

"All right, Bob; we will keep him posted."

Dick had found a tall tree close to the edge of the timber, on the side toward Princeton, and by climbing this tree it was possible to see what was going on in the town tolerably distinctly. At any rate, no body of men could leave the town without being seen by any one in the tree.

As it was quite cold, Dick had it arranged so that the youths took turn about in keeping watch.

Each remained in the tree-top half an hour, when another would relieve him.

They kept close watch through the day, and while they had seen men moving about in the town, and behind the earthworks which Donop had thrown up, there was as yet no signs that the British were anywhere near ready to move on Trenton. They were waiting for something, though Dick could not imagine what it could be.

They had supper soon after dark, and sat down in front of the fireplace to talk of the war.

They were sitting there, talking, when there came the sound of footsteps outside.

Next the door opened, and a young man in the uniform of a British soldier entered.

He had got inside the house and closed the door before he seemed to notice the presence of Dick and the other youths, and then he paused and gave utterance to an exclamation of astonishment.

At the same time Mr. and Mrs. Sprague cried in unison: "Tom!"

Then Dick understood.

This was Tom Sprague, the Tory son of whom the two had spoken, and whose clothes Dick had worn to the town the night before.

Mrs. Sprague sprang to her feet, and running to the newcomer, seized him in her arms and kissed him.

Dick watched the young man closely, and was pleased to see that he seemed glad to see his mother, and that he returned the kiss.

Then Mr. Sprague advanced and shook the boy by the hand.

"He's not a bad fellow, even though he is a Tory, and the British army," thought Dick. "Still, I wish he had put off coming to see his parents for a while longer."

Then Tom Sprague looked around at the youths, recognizing their uniforms, and said:

"Who are these young gentlemen, and what are they doing here?"

Mrs. Sprague did not answer, and her husband coughed and hesitated.

He did not know what to say.

Dick decided to relieve them of embarrassment.

"We are a party out hunting," he said, quietly. "We lost our way, and stopped here to get something to eat."

The young man looked at Dick searchingly.

"I don't believe it," he said bluntly, "and I think I know who you are, too!"

"Oh, Tom!" exclaimed his mother.

Dick gave Mrs. Sprague a smile, and a gesture which was meant to be reassuring.

"So you think you know who I am?" he remarked.

"I am sure of it. I heard all about the young spy who was in Princeton last night, and I would wager a round sum that you are that very fellow—Dick Slater!"

"So you think I am Dick Slater, do you?"

"I am sure of it."

Dick smiled.

"You are right," he said. "And now, I must ask you what your purpose is when you return to Princeton. You will not report our presence here at the home of your parents, will you?"

"Why not?"

Tom Sprague looked at his parents and then at Dick with a look of defiance.

"For this reason," said Dick; "if you were to do that, it might result in trouble for your parents."

"Why so?"

"Because they have given us food and shelter."

"I can't help it; I shall report your presence here," said Tom, somewhat doggedly. "I don't think they will harm my parents, when I am a soldier in their army. If I thought they would, I'd——"

"Quit fighting for King George, eh? Well, you had better not risk it, Tom."

"No, don't do it, Tom," said his father.

But Tom was stubborn.

"I've got to do it," he declared. "I wouldn't be true to my king if I had this information and kept it from my superior."

officers. I shall tell them as soon as I get back—and I had better go right back.”

“Oh, no; don’t go right back!” pleaded his mother, and then she advanced, and taking the youth’s hands in hers, said in a still more pleading voice: “Please, Tom, don’t tell thet these young men air here! Prommus me thet, won’t ye?”

Tom hesitated.

Then he said, with an air of determination:

“I’ve got to tell, mother. I can’t promise what you ask.”

“Yer a fool, Tom Sprague, ef ye do be my own son!” said Mr. Sprague.

Dick rose and approached the three, who were standing in the middle of the room.

“Your son is right, Mr. Sprague,” he said quietly.

“Eh—what d’ye say, Dick—he’s right?” exclaimed the man.

Mrs. Sprague and the “Liberty Boys” looked at Dick in astonishment, while Tom Sprague regarded Dick with a look of surprise and distrust and suspicion.

He decided that Dick was intent on playing some trick on him.

“It is this way,” went on Dick. “Your son is a soldier in the British army; now, if he were to return to the army, and having this information, were to keep it secret, he would not be true to his king. He would be a traitor, and you would not wish your son to be a traitor, or false to the cause for which he is fighting?”

All looked at Dick with surprise written on their faces.

“What can Dick be driving at?” thought Bob. “Surely he isn’t going to let that young fellow go back and report our presence here!”

The other youths were thinking much the same as Bob.

The parents of the young man shook their heads.

“No, I wouldn’t want ’im ter be er traitor an’ er sneak,” said Mr. Sprague.

“No; we wouldn’t want ’im ter do ennythin’ dishonerble,” the mother said.

“Of course not,” said Dick, “so we cannot consistently ask him to keep the matter of our being here a secret.”

“Thet’s so,” agreed Mr. Sprague, “but I hate ter hev ’im back an’ inform on ye, and spile all yer plans.”

“Oh, he won’t do that, Mr. Sprague,” said Dick, quietly. “I will fix it so that he won’t do that.”

“How?”

“By making him a prisoner, and keeping him here against his will, and by force!” said Dick, in the calmest and most matter-of-fact manner imaginable.

“What!” almost shouted Tom Sprague, leaping back and staring at Dick.

CHAPTER VII.

A PRISONER UNDER PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES.

All stared at Dick.

They understood now why he had approved of Tom’s determination to reveal their presence at the house of his parents when he returned to his army.

Dick did not intend that he should return.

“I thought so!” murmured Bob, under his breath.

Mr. Sprague’s under jaw dropped at first, and then a queer, comical grin overspread his homely face as the humor of the idea struck him.

Mrs. Sprague looked amazed, startled and distressed.

Evidently she hardly knew what to think or say.

“Say, thet’ll be er good joke, won’t it?” exclaimed Mr. Sprague. “Ther idee uv makin’ er pris’ner uv Tom an’ holdin’ uv ’im in his own home, with his own parents to keep watch uv ’im, is erbout ther funniest thing I ever heerd uv!”

“But it won’t happen, father,” said Tom.

“Why not, Tom?”

“Because I’m not going to let myself be captured.”

As Tom Sprague spoke he whirled and made a dash for the door.

He had not fooled Dick, however.

The youth had been watching him closely.

He saw the young Tory was going to do something desperate.

Of course, the most likely thing he would do would be to try to escape from the cabin.

Dick realized this.

So when Tom made a dash for the door he was not quick enough.

Dick leaped forward like a panther.

He was upon the young man before he could reach the door.

Dick seized Tom Sprague by the shoulders and jerked him backward and away from the door.

Then he seized the young fellow’s wrists and pulled them together behind his back.

“Bob!” he said, in a calm tone of voice, “come and tie his wrists together.”

Bob leaped forward.

“What shall I tie them with, Dick?” he asked.

Dick looked around at Mr. Sprague.

“Have you anything that will do?” he asked. “A piece of deerskin thong will answer nicely.”

“Yes, I have plenty of it. I will get a piece.”

“Do so.”

Dick glanced at Mrs. Sprague.

She stood with hands clasped, a look of fear on her face.

"Be not alarmed, Mrs. Sprague," said Dick, gently. "Your son shall not be harmed. I would not injure him for the world. We will simply keep him a prisoner here a couple of days, and you shall be his jailor. I know he will not suffer, with his mother to look after him and give him food."

"This is an outrage!" growled Tom.

"Oh, no; it is simply necessary that we should prevent you from returning and telling that we are here. You shall be well taken care of, and no harm whatever will come to you."

"I'm not so sure about that."

"You are not? What do you mean?"

"I got leave of absence for to-night only; if I fail to return to-morrow morning I shall be looked upon as a deserter."

"Oh, no; we'll fix that," said Dick. "We don't want the king's soldiers to come prowling around here in search of you, so will send word to your commanding officer that you are suddenly ill, and cannot return for a few days."

The face of Mrs. Sprague, which had grown anxious when Tom said he would be branded a deserter, cleared now, and she breathed more freely again.

Mr. Sprague now approached with the deerskin thong, and Bob tied Tom's wrists together tightly, after which he was given a seat on a bench in front of the fireplace.

He looked sullen and moody, however.

He was evidently greatly put out over his capture.

Presently he turned to his mother.

"Mother," he said, in a reproachful tone, "I wouldn't have believed you would allow me to be trussed up in this fashion right before your eyes."

"I couldn't help myself, if I wished to, Tom," was the reply, "but ye air in no danger, an' I would rather ye wuz heer, a pris'ner, than thet ye hed gone back an' informed on these young men."

The conversation was not very lively during the rest of the evening.

The prisoner was sullen and silent, and his mother maintained a sad silence, and hardly took her eyes off her son.

Mr. Sprague was cheerful.

He looked at things in a philosophical manner.

"Tom hain't got nothin' ter complain uv," he said. "He's more lucky 'n whut mos' pris'ners uv war is, fur he is in his own home, an' knows that even his enemies is friendly to him."

"True," said Dick. "We would protect your son's life with our own, if necessary."

They all lay down at half-past ten o'clock, Mr. and Mrs.

Sprague retiring to Tom's room, and the prisoner remaining out in the large room with the "Liberty Boys."

They were up early next morning, and immediately after breakfast Dick wrote a note to Tom's commanding officer stating that he was sick and could not return for a couple of days, and signed the young man's name to it.

This he gave to Mr. Sprague, who set out at once for Princeton.

"Keep your eyes open, Mr. Sprague," said Dick, as the man started, "and if you see anything unusual going on in the camp of the enemy, let me know when you come back."

"All right, Dick; I'll do et, ye may be sure."

Mr. Sprague returned at the end of two hours.

He reported that the officer had simply ordered that Tom should return just as soon as he was able to do so.

He reported to Dick privately that while there was considerable stir in the British camp, there were as yet no signs of a general movement.

"I guess they will wait till the time decided upon—January 2d," said Dick.

Mr. Sprague said he thought this likely.

Dick sent a message to the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army right away after dinner, giving a statement of affairs, and in the evening, when the messenger returned, he brought a message from General Washington.

In the message the commander-in-chief stated that he was going to send General Greene, with six hundred men and two field pieces forward, on the morrow, so as to be in readiness to harass the British when they started to move on Trenton. The commander-in-chief told Dick to give such aid as he could to General Greene, and assist him in selecting a point at which to take up his position.

Dick told the boys privately what the commander-in-chief had written.

"Don't say anything about it before Tom Sprague," he cautioned. "He might escape, you know, and we don't want the British to know of General Greene's presence until he opens fire on them."

That night, as they sat in front of the fireplace talking, there came the sound of footsteps outside, followed by a loud knock at the door.

The youths looked at each other inquiringly.

More than one of them laid their hands on the butts of their pistols.

Mr. Sprague started to go to the door, but Dick made a detaining gesture and went to the door himself.

He opened the door and saw a man in the uniform of a British soldier standing there.

Dick's mind was made up instantly.

They would have to make this fellow a prisoner, as they had Tom Sprague.

He stepped back and said:

"Come in, sir."

The redcoat entered and looked at the dozen youths in wondering amazement.

Dick closed the door quickly, but without much noise, and put up the bar.

"W-why, what does this mean?" the redcoat gasped, and then as his eyes fell on Tom, who sat there with his hands tied together behind his back, his eyes almost popped out.

"It means that you have run into a trap, Johnson," said Tom, in a bitter tone. "These young gentlemen are at present running things here, and you will be treated to a dose of the same kind of medicine I have had to take."

"What! and you were not sick at all?"

The redcoat was almost paralyzed.

"No more than you, Johnson."

"But that message to the colonel?"

"Was written by that young man," nodding toward Dick. "He is Dick Slater, the 'rebel' spy, Johnson. You've heard of him?"

"I should say I have!" and Johnson looked at Dick with an air of interest.

"He was in the camp the other night; and even in General Howe's headquarters, you remember."

"Yes, I remember."

"You see the futility of trying to resist, I hope, Mr. Johnson," said Dick. "It would do you no good, and might do you some harm, as we might be forced to hurt you. Kindly place your hands behind your back."

Johnson hesitated.

A look at the dozen "Liberty Boys," however, decided him. It would be folly to try to resist.

He would be overpowered in a twinkling.

So he did as Dick ordered.

He placed his hands behind his back, and Dick placed his wrists together.

"Another deerskin thong, if you please, Mr. Sprague," said Dick, quietly, and Mr. Sprague soon produced the thong.

Then Dick and Bob tied Johnson's wrists together tightly. Next he was given a seat beside Tom on a bench.

"I am sorry that we have to serve you in this manner," said Dick, quietly, "but it is necessary, and it will be for only two or three days longer."

"I don't think we will have to stay that long," said Johnson.

"Why not?" asked Dick, with a smile.

"Because, when I fail to return, they will come here to see what has become of me. If you are here, you will be captured, and we will be set free."

"That's the way you figure it, is it?"

"Yes."

"Well, we shall be forced to see to it that that does not happen," with a smile.

Then Dick called Mr. Sprague to one side.

"Will you go into the British camp again for me, Mr. Sprague?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "Whut d'ye want me ter do this time, Dick?"

"I want you to go to the colonel of Tom's and this other man's regiment and ask him to let Johnson remain here for a while."

Mr. Sprague looked puzzled.

"But whut shall I giv 'im ez an excuse fur wantin' Johnson ter stay?"

"Tell him that Tom wishes it. Tell him that Tom is lonesome, and would like to have his comrade at his bedside. I think the colonel will be willing to grant your request."

"I think so; I kin try et, ennyhow."

Mr. Sprague started at once, and as in the other instance, was gone about two hours.

"Well," remarked Dick, "what did the colonel say?"

"He said it was all right, and that the man might stay."

"Very good."

Then Dick turned to Johnson, who was looking on with an inquiring look on his face.

"They won't come to look for you now, Mr. Johnson," he said.

"Why not?"

"Mr. Sprague went to your colonel and asked permission for you to stay with Tom a day or two, and he granted it."

Tom Sprague and the redcoat, Johnson, looked at each other.

"You can't get ahead of that fellow!" said Tom, presently. "He is the boldest fellow in the world, and is full of tricks."

"I have heard a lot about him," said Johnson, "and I am free to say that I did not believe more than half of what I heard. I believe all of it now, however."

"I can easily believe it all, and more," said Tom, with a lugubrious look on his face.

"Are you going to turn us over to the rebel army?" asked Johnson.

"No," replied Dick. "That is, not if you will promise to not say or do anything to get Tom's parents in trouble. He won't, of course."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that."

"Very good; then you will both be allowed to rejoin your army."

Shortly after dinner next day a messenger arrived at the cabin.

He had been sent on ahead, and he brought the information that General Greene and his men were within a couple of miles of there, and coming, so as to be ready to interfere with the movements of the British when they should start next day on their advance toward Trenton.

General Greene wanted Dick to come and meet him, and help him select a point that would be advantageous, and allow of using the field pieces with effect.

Dick mounted his horse at once, and telling the youths to remain where they were till he returned, and to keep a sharp lookout, he rode away in the company of the messenger.

They rode a mile and a half in the direction of Trenton, and came upon General Greene and his little army.

"Ah, I'm glad to see you, Dick," said Greene. "Now let's canvass the situation. I wish to find a location where I can command the road along which the British will advance, with the field pieces, and it must be a location from which it will be possible to retire quickly and easily when it becomes necessary to do so."

Dick pondered for a few moments, and then turning in his saddle, he pointed to a wooded ridge on the right hand side, and half a mile nearer Princeton.

"There is the best place, in my estimation, General Greene," he said. "It is a quarter of a mile off to one side from the road, but it is high enough so that it will be possible to use the field pieces with effect, I am sure."

General Greene looked at the ridge for a few moments and then said:

"I think it will answer very well for our purpose. Forward, men!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE LIBERTY BOYS TO THE RESCUE."

The little army moved slowly forward, and turning aside into the timber, the men followed a sort of path, and presently reached the ridge.

To haul the field pieces up to the top of the ridge was no small task, but it was accomplished presently.

General Greene and Dick set about selecting the points where the field pieces were to be stationed, and soon had these decided upon.

To General Greene's delight, it was possible to see clear to Princeton from the top of the ridge.

"This is a splendid location for our purpose," he said to Dick.

"Yes," the youth replied. "All you will have to be careful about is to retire from here in time when the British are advancing."

"True; I shall have to look out not to delay moving from here so long as to give the British a chance to get past our flank. They might surround us and capture us then, which would be very bad indeed.

"So it would," acquiesced Dick.

"I hope they have received no intimation of our approach," said the general. "If we can lie low, and take them by surprise to-morrow, as they come marching along the road, we will have a chance to do them a fine lot of damage."

"True, sir; I don't think they have the least suspicion of your presence in the vicinity. I have seen no scouts out since coming here."

"I am glad of that."

Then the general went about giving orders, and presently the force was comfortably encamped—as comfortably as was possible, of course, in the cold weather.

Dick remained there a couple of hours, and then bade General Greene good-by and rode away.

He made his way back to the cabin.

All was quiet there.

Dick told the boys that General Greene and his little army were close at hand, and the youths were well pleased.

"There'll be some astonished redcoats to-morrow when they come marching along the road," said Bob, grinning with glee.

"You are right, Bob," agreed Dick.

The youths remained at the cabin that night.

Next morning Dick called Mr. Sprague to one side.

"I am going to take my men and go and join General Greene," he said, "and I will leave Tom and the redcoat in your hands. Don't liberate them until after you hear the sound of our cannon. Then let them loose."

"All right," was the reply. "Well, Dick, I hope ye'll hev good luck an' be able ter keep ther British back."

"Thank you. We expect only to be able to retard their progress and cause them considerable trouble and delay, however."

Then Dick gave the order for the youths to get ready to start, and they hastened to obey.

They were tired of remaining at the cabin doing nothing. They wished to get into action.

They were never so happy as when they were getting ready to engage the enemy.

When they were ready, Dick and the rest of the youths

shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Sprague, thanked them for the hospitality which they had shown, bade them good-by, and rode away.

They soon reached the road.

They rode along till they came to the point where the path turned off leading to the ridge, and they turned off and made their way up to the top of the ridge.

They were greeted cordially by General Greene.

"Have they started yet?" asked Dick, when he had tied his horse.

"No; but I see considerable stirring about among the troops," replied General Greene. "I think they will start soon."

This prophecy proved to be correct.

Fifteen minutes later the British troops were seen leaving Princeton and marching down the road toward the south.

"There they come!" cried Bob.

"Yes, they're moving at last!" said Dick.

In the distance the stream of men looked like a moving serpent of great size and length, and as the men advanced the serpent grew in size and took on a brighter hue of red in the rays of the ascending sun.

Then presently the great serpent began to disintegrate and separate into minute and distinct parts.

Then after a while these little parts took on the shape of men.

Men of liliputian proportions.

Then presently, as the men grew in size, the faint sound of the fifes and drums was heard.

The head of the long column had now reached the entrance to the timber.

They were now within range, and it would have been possible to do considerable damage with the field pieces, but General Greene wished to let the front end of the column get within range of his men who had been sent down and stationed along the timber bordering the road, before opening fire with the pieces.

General Greene wished to discourage the redcoats as much as possible.

Greene was an able general.

He is conceded to-day as having been almost the equal of Washington.

But the greatest generals sometimes make mistakes.

Napoleon made a mistake at Waterloo.

Other famous generals of the world's history have made serious mistakes.

And General Greene made a serious mistake on this day of which we are writing.

He forgot, or did not take into consideration, the fact

that the British were burning to avenge the disaster of Trenton, when one thousand prisoners had been taken by the patriot army, and the British had been forced to retreat in hot haste to Princeton.

He waited too long before opening fire with his field pieces, and as the sound of the first shot of these pieces was to be the signal for the soldiers to open fire with the muskets, their fire was delayed also.

The result was that the extreme front of the long column of British troops had passed when the order was given to fire the field pieces.

The gunners obeyed promptly.

They would have fired sooner, gladly, but they had to wait for the order.

The instant the field pieces spoke, the men stationed in the timber alongside the road opened with the muskets, and the rattle-rattle of the musketry was good to hear.

"The fight is on at last!" exclaimed Bob Estabrook, his eyes shining eagerly.

"Yes; I am afraid General Greene delayed too long," said Dick, soberly. "Those redcoats might rush on past us to the number of a thousand, execute a flank movement, thus cutting off our retreat, and then where would we be?"

"In trouble," responded Bob, promptly.

"You are right. Well, I hope they won't have the energy and courage sufficient to make the attempt."

"So do I!" said Mark Morrison.

The British line was thrown into confusion by the unexpected attack.

The balls from the field pieces were well placed, both striking in the line and killing a number of the redcoats, while the fire from the muskets along the roadside, coming from such short range, was especially galling and destructive.

The British showed great bravery, however, and answered the fire with their muskets as best they could.

Then suddenly an officer at the head of the column shouted an order, and the men broke into a run.

They ran down the road as rapidly as they could, and a cheer went up from many of the patriot soldiers.

They thought the British were frightened, and were running to get away from the fire of the men concealed along the road.

Dick knew better, however, and a grave look came over his face.

"They are going to flank us and cut off our retreat, Bob!" he said.

"It looks like it, Dick."

The field pieces had been loaded and fired several times now, and Dick made his way to General Greene's side.

"It looks like they are going to flank us, and cut off our retreat, General Greene," he said respectfully.

"Yes; that is what they intend trying to do, Dick, but I do not think they can keep us from getting through. As we have done considerable execution, however, I will give the order to fall back and retreat."

He did so, and the movement began as soon as the men could get the field pieces ready to remove from the top of the ridge.

The British had been improving their time, and several hundred of the men had got past, and they were already executing the flank movement.

In order to escape and make a successful retreat, the patriot soldiers would have to force their way through the British lines.

It was going to be a hard task, and General Greene realized the fact.

He was looking sober-faced and serious.

It would be a severe blow if he allowed himself to be cooped up here and captured.

Dick, who was getting the youths ready to lead the way down the slope, happened to look down the road toward Trenton, and a little cry of joy escaped him.

A band of horsemen was coming along the road at a sweeping gallop.

They were less than a mile away.

Dick knew they were patriot soldiers, and he jumped at once to the conclusion that they were his company of "Liberty Boys."

They would be eager to be in the engagement which would take place between the men under Greene and the British, he knew, and he felt sure that the band of horsemen was made up of the "Liberty Boys."

He hastened to General Greene's side and called his attention to the horsemen.

"They are our men," he said, "and I think it will be a good idea for myself and the eleven youths with me who are mounted to ride down and through the British line, and then we can meet the horsemen yonder and come back and engage them, thus diverting their attention from your men's movements. What do you think?"

"A very good plan, Dick. Put it into execution at once."

Dick ran to his horse, mounted, and cried, "Forward, all! Follow me!"

He rode down the slope along the path at a gallop, the other youths—who were already mounted—following closely.

When they reached the bottom of the slope, and were nearing the road, where the patriot soldiers were engaging the

British, the youths spurred their horses forward at full speed.

They held their muskets in readiness for instant use.

The next instant they were in the midst of the redcoats, and they fired their muskets full in the faces of the British soldiers.

Then they clubbed the weapons, and striking to right and left, and shouting lustily, they forced their way through the lines of the British like a cyclone.

Then they galloped down the road at full speed, leaving the British badly demoralized by the onslaught.

But the "Liberty Boys" were not through yet.

In fact, they had hardly begun.

As soon as the others who were coming up the road should join them they would return and make the redcoats think they were contending with a hurricane and thunderbolt combined.

They met the oncoming body of horsemen before they had gone a third of a mile.

They proved to be the entire company of "Liberty Boys," as Dick had surmised.

"Hurrah!" he cried, waving his sword, "you are just in time, boys! We are needed badly to hold the redcoats back while the members of General Greene's force retreat with the field pieces. Come on, boys, and let the 'Liberty Boys to the Rescue!' be your cry!"

The youths answered with a cheer, and then one cried:

"Lead on, Dick! We'll go where you go, and do as you do!"

"Good!" cried Dick, whirling his horse around in the road. "Forward, all! Follow me!"

Then the entire company, with Dick in the lead, went racing up the road.

They were upon the British in a twinkling, it seemed like, and the members of the company fired a volley into the faces of the redcoats, and then clubbing the muskets, fell upon them with the fury of demons.

"The Liberty Boys to the Rescue!" was the cry.

CHAPTER IX.

FIERCE FIGHTING.

They cleft the British lines with as much ease as if they had been straw men, seemingly.

They tore it in two at the point where the path joined the main road, and hurled the ends asunder to the right and to the left.

The men under General Greene were fighting like demons also, but it is almost certain that they could not have broken through the British lines and escaped unaided.

Hence the "Liberty Boys" had virtually rescued them from death or capture, for now that the British line was cut in two, they were enabled to come pouring through the opening and start to retreat down the road.

The company of "Liberty Boys" divided, Bob being at the head of one division, and Dick at the head of the other, and they drove both ends of the British line backward upon themselves, and held them there until General Greene and all his men had emerged from the timber, through the gap, and were retreating down the road.

Dick and the portion of the company under his command had the hardest task, as they had turned to the left and had virtually the entire British army to hold in check.

Of course the road through the timber was narrow and the British could not advance very rapidly, but there was lots of force there, those behind pushing the ones in front forward.

This made it a difficult matter to stay the advance of the enemy, but by dint of the fiercest kind of fighting they managed to accomplish it.

They held the redcoats back until General Greene and his men filed through and were moving down the road, and then they began falling back.

They fell back very slowly, however.

They contested every foot of the ground with great stubbornness.

Bob and his division now joined Dick and his men, and they moved backward all together.

They retired very slowly.

They were a host within themselves, and they were enabled to make the advance of the British as slow as the proverbial snail's pace.

Dick glanced over his shoulder.

He saw that Greene's men were running, and dragging the field pieces down the road at a lively rate, and he thought he knew what that meant.

Dick kept on encouraging the "Liberty Boys" to keep up the fight, and presently he glanced back over his shoulder again.

The men with the field pieces had stopped and were loading the cannon.

"Ah, I thought so!" he said to himself. "They are going to range the cannon and turn them loose up the road. We will have to get out of the way when they are ready to fire."

Dick kept glancing back every few seconds, and at last he saw one of the men wave his hat.

"They are ready!" thought Dick, and then in a loud voice he cried:

"Ride down the road fifty yards and then turn aside into the timber! They are going to fire the field pieces! Quick!"

He repeated the order, and the youths suddenly stopped trying to hold the redcoats in check, and turning their horses, galloped down the road a distance of fifty yards.

Then at the word from Dick they turned aside and rode into the timber, leaving Greene's men and the redcoats facing each other and not more than three hundred yards apart.

The British saw the frowning muzzles of the field pieces, and knew what was coming.

In fact, those in the front ranks had heard what Dick had said to his men, and there had already been a wild scramble for the protection of the timber at the roadside by those in the front ranks.

It was impracticable for the entire British army to take to the woods, however, and it was merely a few hundred men in the front ranks who did so.

Those who had been behind them were treated to a very unpleasant dose of war before they realized that they were in danger.

For the patriot gunners did not wait long.

They already had the range, and as soon as the "Liberty Boys" had got away from between them and the enemy they fired.

The shots from the cannon did terrible execution, striking the front end of the line, and tearing along through the ranks of the British, and mowing them down like grain before the scythe.

Shouts, shrieks and groans followed, and the British line fell into terrible disorder and confusion.

General Greene and his men now resumed their retreat, and Dick and the "Liberty Boys" rode out from among the trees and followed them.

The British had been so demoralized by the shots from the field pieces that they did not fire upon the youths at all, and they escaped without trouble.

When they had gone a quarter of a mile or so General Greene ordered a halt.

The field pieces were reloaded and trained up the road.

The "Liberty Boys" got out of the way, and again the pieces spoke.

They did considerable execution this time also, but not so much as on the former occasion.

The British had not pursued closely, and were more than a third of a mile away.

Considerable damage was inflicted, however, and it was evident that the patriot force could now take its time and

proceed leisurely, as the British would not advance close upon the field pieces unless it was absolutely necessary.

Of course, if the patriot force had stopped and tried to stand its ground, the British would have come on, and would have captured the pieces, but as long as the patriots pursued their tactics of firing and then retreating, the British would hold back and be content with advancing slowly.

General Greene now rode up to Dick and asked him if one of his "Liberty Boys" would take a message to the commander-in-chief, and Dick promptly answered in the affirmative.

"I was just thinking of sending one of the boys, in accordance with the instructions of the commander-in-chief, given to me the other day, before I left Trenton, but if you have a message to send, the one messenger will be sufficient—and the one message also, I judge, as you will explain everything."

General Greene wrote a brief message to Washington, informing him of the situation, and the message was delivered into the hands of Mark Morrison, with instructions to ride rapidly, and take it to the commander-in-chief as soon as possible.

Mark took the message, placed it in his pocket, saluted, and rode away at a gallop.

Then the work of harassing the British and holding them in check was resumed with vigor.

Parties of men were detached and left in the woods at various points, and these fired upon the advancing British, while at regular intervals the field pieces were discharged, usually with good effect.

"I wish to delay them as much as possible," said General Greene to Dick, as they sat side by side on their horses and watched the result of the shots from the cannon. "I don't wish to let them get to Trenton in time to bring on a full engagement to-day. The commander-in-chief will want a little time to think up a plan for outwitting them, and if he has the night for it he will find a way, I am sure."

"I think so," agreed Dick. "He is a great general."

"Ah, yes, he is a great general, Dick; and a wonderful man! Yes, he is indeed a wonderful man, else the British and Hessians would be occupying Trenton to-day, instead of the patriot forces."

"That was remarkable, the crossing of the Delaware in the night, and attacking Trenton in the early morning, amidst a driving storm of sleet and snow. No other man would have attempted such a thing."

"You are right, Dick. Ah, if Washington lives, we shall yet be a free and independent people!"

"Then I hope he will live many years!" said Dick.

"And so do I, my boy!"

That was a long day.

The patriots worked like beavers.

They retired, loaded the field pieces, fired them, and then retired, loaded them again and fired them again, and repeated this over and over till all the ammunition was exhausted, and all the time the soldiers were firing upon the British from the timber at the side of the road, and causing the redcoats lots of trouble and the loss of many men.

The patriots contested every foot of the ground, and the advance of the enemy was very slow as a consequence.

General Greene was in hopes that he might delay the British so badly that they would not reach Trenton until nightfall, but when the ammunition for the field pieces gave out the redcoats advanced more rapidly, and it was soon seen that it would be impossible to hold them back so that they would be until nightfall in reaching Trenton.

General Greene did the best he could, however, and so well did his brave men do their work that the British did not enter Trenton until late in the afternoon.

A messenger met Greene as his men reached Trenton, and informed him that the commander-in-chief and his entire army had withdrawn across the Assunpink, a small river which flows into the Delaware, just south of Trenton.

Washington had sent orders for Greene and his men to cross the Assunpink and join the main army at once.

This was done, and General Washington met General Greene as he rode into the patriot lines, and congratulated him on the good work which he had that day performed.

"I take no credit to myself for this day's work, your excellency," said General Greene. "In truth, I made a bad blunder, and but for the bravery and wonderful fighting of this company of 'Liberty Boys' I fear that my force would have been captured!"

"Indeed! Say you so?" exclaimed the commander-in-chief.

"Yes, your excellency," and then General Greene told of how he had delayed too long in opening fire on the British column, and had allowed too great a number of men to get past him, thus making it possible for the British to execute a flank movement and hem him in.

"It would have succeeded, too, but for the splendid daring of Master Dick Slater and his company of 'Liberty Boys,'" declared Greene. "To them belongs the credit."

Washington advanced and gave his hand to Dick.

"General Greene informs me that you and your company of 'Liberty Boys' virtually rescued him and his men from a trap to-day, Master Dick," he said, "and I wish to thank

you, and your brave boys as well, for the work which you did so well!"

"We did but our duty, your excellency," said Dick, flushing to his eyes. "We were glad to be able to lend the needed assistant to General Greene."

"Spoken like the brave and modest youth that you are!" said the commander-in-chief, and then he turned to General Greene and began explaining the disposition of the patriot forces, and he pointed out the location of the batteries which had been so placed as to command the bridge and a couple of fords across the Assunpink.

"If the British try to force their way across they will find themselves in trouble," he said.

"Yes, indeed, your excellency," agreed Greene. "Well, they won't have much daylight in which to work. I tried to delay them till dark, but the ammunition for the field pieces gave out, and they came along faster after that, as these pieces had held them back more than anything else."

"Well, it is late, and, as you say, they will not have a great deal of daylight in which to work, so I think their attacks will not avail them anything."

Half an hour later the British, who had paused in the town half an hour or so, advanced and made an attempt to cross on the bridge and at the fords.

The batteries opened fire on them, however, and after a few minutes of brisk cannonading the British were forced to retire.

Hundreds of men with muskets were posted in the timber near the bridge and the fords, and they poured a galling fire into the ranks of the British, aiding greatly in disconcerting them, and causing them to falter in their attempt to get across.

They were not disposed to give up yet, however. The redcoats were possessed of bulldog courage. They might be overwhelmed and forced back once, but they would try again.

And they did.

The result was the same as before.

They were repulsed with considerable slaughter.

Half an hour elapsed, and again they made the attempt.

To fail for the third time.

The batteries of the patriots were so admirably placed, and the men handling the guns were such splendid marksmen, that it was impossible to make the crossing.

It was now growing dark, and General Cornwallis, of the British army, decided to defer further operations till morning.

Ersine, his right-hand officer, urged Cornwallis to attack

the Americans that night, but the British commander said no.

"We have run down the old fox at last," he said, complacently, "and in the morning we will bag him!"

But Cornwallis was to learn that there is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.

CHAPTER X.

A "FOXY" MOVE.

Shortly after dark General Washington called a council of war.

He wished to get the views of the members of his staff before deciding upon any course of action.

The trouble was that the situation was critical in the extreme.

Washington's entire army did not much exceed five thousand, while that of the British numbered at least eight thousand men.

And Cornwallis had sent back to Princeton for two thousand men whom he had left there to come on to Trenton to help him in crushing the patriots.

Of course Washington did not know this, but eight thousand men was too large odds to hope to contend against successfully.

Behind Washington and his army was the Delaware, filled with floating ice.

It was utterly impracticable to think of trying to cross the river.

So what was he to do?

The most reasonable course of procedure would be to retreat, but the trouble was that the ground was soft, and it would be impossible to move the forty cannon which the patriot army possessed.

And of course Washington would not think of going away and leaving the cannon.

He could not make war upon the British without the cannon.

So he called the council and explained matters to the members of his staff.

All concurred in the view that the situation was critical.

In the morning the British would move around the right flank of the patriot army, double the army back against the river, and force the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army to surrender.

"I understand the purpose of Cornwallis perfectly," said Washington, "and if the ground were frozen, so that we

could move the cannon, I would execute a flank movement, and, going around the right flank of the British, would advance to Princeton, capture the garrison and stores there, and then move onward to Morristown Heights. But with the ground in this soft condition, I hardly think we can do anything of the kind."

"Perhaps the ground may freeze in a few hours, your excellency," suggested General Greene.

"If it should suddenly turn colder and freeze up, we could execute the movement successfully, I am confident," said Washington.

"Then let us hope it will turn colder at once!" said Sullivan.

"Amen to that!" said Cadwalader.

They were holding the council in a tent, and had been talking for an hour, when General Greene shivered slightly and said:

"It seems to be getting colder, don't you think? It feels that way to me, anyway."

"I believe it has grown colder," said Cadwalader.

"I have thought so for a quarter of an hour past," said Sullivan, but feared the wish was father to the thought, and did not say anything about it.

"We will see!" said Washington, and he strode out of the tent into the open air.

"You are right!" he exclaimed, joyously. "The wind has turned to the north, and it is getting colder every minute! See, the top of the ground is already beginning to freeze!"

"So it is!" agreed Greene.

The commander-in-chief became all life and action at once.

"We will escape the trap Cornwallis has laid for us, after all!" he exclaimed. "More, we will deal them a blow at the same time, and one that they are little expecting. Ah, the fates are for us!"

They returned to the tent and resumed their council.

"I will now outline my plans," said Washington. "It is my intention to make the British think we are here, even after we have gone, and to that end I will need a score or more of brave men who will remain behind and keep the camp fires burning. They may also, with profit to us, make believe to throw up intrenchments, and the British, hearing the sound of the pickaxes, will imagine we are intending to make a stand here in the morning, and will rest easy—only to find their error with the coming of daylight. An hour or two before daylight the men can slip out of the camp, skirt the British army, as we will have done, and make their way to Princeton to rejoin us. Don't you think that a good plan?"

"A splendid plan, your excellency!" cried General Greene. And the other officers said the same.

"But whom will you get to remain in the camp to keep the fires burning?" asked General Sullivan.

"I know the very persons for the work!" exclaimed General Greene. "They will jump at the chance."

"You mean the 'Liberty Boys'?" remarked the commander-in-chief.

"Exactly, your excellency."

"I had them in mind from the first. I, like yourself, think they would be glad to remain. They seem more than willing, always, to take the most dangerous work upon their shoulders."

"Yes; they are brave and noble youths!" said Greene, who could not forget how those same youths had only that day rescued himself and his force of six hundred men, when they were practically in the hands of the enemy.

"I will send for their commander, brave Dick Slater," said General Washington, "and see what he has to say regarding the matter."

The commander-in-chief called an orderly and told him to bring Dick Slater, captain of the company of "Liberty Boys."

The orderly saluted and withdrew.

Half an hour later he returned.

Dick Slater was with him.

Dick saluted, and then looked at the commander-in-chief inquiringly.

"You sent for me, your excellency?" he asked.

"Yes, Dick," was the reply. "I have a very dangerous undertaking on foot, and as usual I have sent for you, to see if you and your brave 'Liberty Boys' would do the work."

"We will try to do it, sir; I promise you that in advance," said Dick, promptly. "What is the work?"

The commander-in-chief explained.

"Will you attempt this, now that you know what the work is, and how dangerous it is?" he asked in conclusion.

"Indeed, yes!" replied Dick. "I can't say that I think it such a very dangerous undertaking, your excellency. The British will scarcely make an attack to-night, more especially when they hear us throwing up intrenchments, and we can easily slip away in the morning before they are stirring."

"Still, they might attack during the night, Dick. And then, they might reconnoiter and find that only a few men were here, and then they would be able to capture you."

"We will risk it," smiled Dick.

"Then you and your company of 'Liberty Boys' will do this work?"

"Yes, your excellency."

"That is settled, then; now we will begin to make our preparations for moving from this place."

"There is nothing more you wish to speak to me about, your excellency?" inquired the youth.

"No, save to thank you for your kindness in accepting a post of such danger. I hope you will have no trouble, Dick, and that you may be able to rejoin us at Princeton in the morning."

"Thank you sir; I hope so."

Then Dick saluted and withdrew.

Dick made his way straight to the point where the company of "Liberty Boys" was quartered.

"Well, boys, there is work ahead for us," he said, as he seated himself by the camp fire around which the company was drawn.

"What is it, Dick?" asked Bob, eagerly.

"Anything more exciting than our work of this morning?" asked Mark Morrison, drily.

"No, I don't anticipate that it will be as lively as that," replied Dick.

"What is the work, Dick?" asked Sam Sunderland.

"Well, in the first place, as soon as the ground freezes hard enough to bear up the cannon—which will be within a couple of hours or so, if it keeps on getting colder as fast as it has been doing for an hour past—General Washington and the entire army, with the exception of our company, are going to slip away up the creek, cross it, go around the left flank of the British army, proceed to Princeton, capture the garrison and stores, and then go on to Morristown Heights."

"Good enough!" said Bob. "But what are we to do?"

"We are to stay here!"

"To stay here?"

"Yes."

"For what purpose?"

"To mislead the redcoats."

"To mislead them? How can we do that?"

"By remaining here, after the others have gone, and keeping up the camp fires, and by using pickaxes on the frozen ground to make the redcoats think we are throwing up intrenchments."

"Ah, I understand!" exclaimed Bob. "Say, that is a fine plan, isn't it?"

"It certainly is."

The other youths all said the same.

They were glad that they were to remain for the dangerous duty.

It suited their adventurous natures exactly.

Then the idea of the thing pleased them.

In imagination they could see the surprise and discomfiture of the British when they got up in the morning and found the camp of the patriots deserted.

It would be a great joke on the redcoats.

And they were glad they had been selected to play such a prominent part in the affair.

"How long will we stay in camp after the rest have gone, Dick?" asked Bob.

"Until within an hour of sunrise."

"Till within an hour of sunrise, eh?"

"Yes."

"And then we'll get out of here in a hurry."

"Yes; we will mount our horses, go around the left flank of the British, and ride away to Princeton and rejoin the main army."

"All right; that suits me first rate."

The rest said the same.

The weather grew colder and colder, and by half-past ten the ground was frozen hard.

General Washington gave the order to move.

All was in readiness, and the command was obeyed at once.

The army began to move.

The guns were moved the first thing, and it was no small task to get them through the timber in the darkness.

It had to be accomplished with very little noise, too, else the British might hear and suspect what was going on.

To guard against this, Dick and his "Liberty Boys" went to work on the frozen ground with pickaxes and spades, and made as much noise as possible, so as to drown what noise was made by the moving of the cannon and by the trampling of the hundreds of feet on the frozen ground.

At last all the soldiers, with the exception of the company of "Liberty Boys," had disappeared from view in the timber.

The youths kept picking away, however, for half an hour at least, when they were sure the sounds made by the patriot army could no longer be heard, if the British were to listen, and then they stopped picking long enough to put fresh fuel on the fires.

They talked and laughed heartily, and loud enough to be heard by the British.

They felt good, and could not help it.

The thought of what a grand joke was being played on the redcoats was very pleasing.

As a matter of fact, the British could and did hear the boys talking and laughing as they picked away at the frozen ground, and they remarked upon it, and wondered how men who were in such dangerous quarters could be so apparently happy and care-free.

"We'll change their tune for them in the morning!" said more than one redecoat, grimly; but it was they who were forced to change their tune.

Meanwhile, the patriot army, with Washington at its head, was making its way along the south bank of the Assumpink River.

This direction, almost due east, was continued for the distance of a mile, and then a point was reached where it was possible to cross the little stream.

This was accomplished at last, and then describing a semi-circle, the army went around the left flank of the British army, and coming in behind it, struck into the Princeton road, and moved steadily onward in that direction.

The worst part of the affair was over, so the commander-in-chief believed.

He dreaded the trip through the timber, after leaving the camp, and now all that they had to do was to keep on marching.

They would reach Princeton by daylight, he figured.

Perhaps they might have come very near doing so, but something occurred to detain them a while.

They met the two thousand British troops that had been sent for by Cornwallis.

They were going to Trenton to join the main army, and when they saw the front ranks of the American army they thought they were fugitives.

The front van of the British was commanded by Colonel Mawhood, and he ordered his men to intercept and attack the fugitives, as he thought them to be.

His men obeyed, and soon a sharp engagement was being fought, for the Americans, under General Hugh Mercer, were as eager for the fray as the British dare be.

The redcoats soon discovered that this was no little band of fugitives.

The entire forces on both sides quickly came up, and then the British saw that they were outnumbered greatly.

At first, following the wounding of General Mercer by a bayonet thrust, the British had got a little the better of the engagement, but Washington himself now came up, and the tide of battle was quickly changed.

The British column was cut in twain, and one half started to retreat toward New Brunswick, the other half continuing on toward Trenton.

The British loss in this brief engagement was two hundred killed and three hundred taken prisoners. They lost all their cannon.

The American loss was about one hundred.

At about an hour of sunrise the "Liberty Boys" mounted their horses, rode eastward along the south bank of the

Assumpink a distance of a mile or so, and then they crossed and rode northward.

The youths rode onward, and presently, far ahead of them, they saw a column of men approaching.

"Those are not our fellows," said Dick. "I know; it is a band of fugitives, going to join the main army at Trenton."

"I judge you are right, Dick," said Bob. "But what are we going to do—try to fight them?"

"No; there are too many for us to fight."

"Then what will we do?"

"Here is a lane leading off at right angles; we had better turn down it and avoid them."

This was the wisest thing to do.

They would have to ride a mile or two farther in getting to Princeton, but it would be better than to try to fight as large a body of men as that which was coming down the Princeton road.

The redcoats doubtless saw the youths, but they were the fugitives, in full retreat after the encounter with the patriot army, and were so demoralized that they were in no condition to try to head off the little band of horsemen.

So the "Liberty Boys" had no difficulty in escaping.

It was, as they had said, a couple of miles farther to Princeton, the way they had been forced to go, but they rode at a good gait, and succeeded in reaching there by the time the patriot army was ready to start on its march to Morristown Heights.

The garrison left in charge at Princeton by the British had been captured, and the stores also, and the commander-in-chief counted it a very good morning's work, indeed.

He would have liked to have been able to go to New Brunswick and capture the garrison and stores there, but the roads were in bad condition, the distance was eighteen miles—a long tramp—and he decided not to attempt it.

So they marched to Morristown Heights instead, and took up a position there which was absolutely impregnable.

Cornwallis had been utterly and completely outwitted and out-generaled.

He had called the commander-in-chief of the continental army an "old fox," and Washington had proved himself more than worthy of the name.

He had been altogether too sly a fox for Cornwallis.

[THE END.]

The next number (10) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS' NARROW ESCAPE; OR, A NECK-AND-NECK RACE WITH DEATH," by Harry Moore.

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